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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000521

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MW](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM: MINORITY LAW  
FOR MINORITY SUPPORT

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

Ref: Belgrade 489

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Bosniac-Muslim and most Albanian parties have joined the pro-Independence bloc (ref). The ethnic groups represent 15 percent and 7 percent of the population respectively. In poloff's meetings with the Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA), the Bosniak Party (BP), and the Democratic Community of Muslims-Bosniacs in Montenegro (DZMB-CG), a clear quid pro quo arose: passage of a new Law on Minorities by April 30 in return for minority support for independence. The law's provision of quota seats for ethnic parties has been questioned by the Council of Europe. End Summary.

Solidifying Minority Support for Independence

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¶2. (SBU) Opinion polls and past election results indicate a strong sympathy for Montenegrin independence among minorities, including Muslims, Bosniacs, Albanians and Croats. However, past actions by the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists against the (nominally civic but Bosniac/Muslim-rooted) Party of Democratic Action (SDA) starting in 1997 placed their support at risk, as did the contentious issue of the city status of Tuzi, an ethnically Albanian suburb of the capital of Podgorica. With the pro-Independence and pro-Union blocs required to declare their composition to qualify for state campaign funding, the blocs began to court the minority parties.

The Pro-Union Bloc Offer Comes up Short

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¶3. (SBU) The Bosniak Party (BP) was explicit about the offer they received from Predrag Bulatovic of the pro-Union Socialist People's Party (SNP). Speaking with poloff March 29 in BP's headquarters in Rozaje in northern Montenegro, party president Rafet Husovic, said Bulatovic told them he could offer them nothing now, but a future SNP-led GoM would give the BP one ministerial seat, and support for the minister later standing for a seat in the republic parliament.

The Pro-Independence Bloc Offers Seats, Now

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¶4. (SBU) Conversely, PM Djukanovic was more forthcoming. As confirmed to poloff by Ferhat Dinosa of with the Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA) on March 16, by Husovic, and by party president Rifat Veskovic of the Democratic Community of Muslims-Bosniacs in Montenegro (DZMB-CG) on March 29 in

Bijelo Polje, the GoM has promised a new Law on Minorities by April 30. The new Law creates eight set-aside seats for minorities. Unlike the present law, which has four set-aside seats only for Albanians, and which can be held by civic (non-ethnic) parties like the DPS, the new seats can only be held by "authentic" representatives: members of ethnic parties -- like DUA (which now has one seat), or DZMB or BP, which now have none. Under the law's formula, the Croatian minority (whose Croatian Civic Initiative is a member of the pro-Independence bloc) will get one seat, Muslims will get one, Bosniaks will get two, and Albanians four (two as an ethnic minority, two as a linguistic minority). Local Council of Europe office head Vlade Ristovski told us March 23 that the CoE disapproved of the law's set-aside provisions, but has not been given by the GoM a formal role in reviewing the bill, nor would the CoE move to block its passage.

... and After the Referendum, a New Constitution

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¶15. (SBU) The Vice-President of the Bosniak National Council in Serbia and Montenegro (BNC), Dr. Amer Halilovic, told poloff March 29 in Rozaje that the GoM has yet to complete the legal framework to protect minorities, especially Bosniaks. He expects that after the referendum, a new constitution explicitly recognize Bosniaks as a "constitutive people" on Montenegro, setting the stage for greater participation of Bosniaks in the government and administration, at all levels and in all sectors, to include police and judiciary. The BNC, BP, DZMB-CG, DUA, and the Democratic Alliance of Montenegro (DSCG, an ethnically Albanian with one parliamentary seat), all share a desire to see a bicameral parliament after independence, with the new house being a "house of peoples" on the Bosnian model in the 1995 Dayton agreement. The Bosniaks

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and Muslims convey, however, a sharper interest in the House of Peoples than do the Albanian parties, and see their exclusion from a proportional share of representation in government as more critical.

A Seamless Border in the Sandzak

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¶16. (SBU) Halilovic was clear that while, like most Bosniacs, sees the Sandzak (lying across the boundary between Serbia and Montenegro) as one region, he was decidedly pro-Independence. He strongly welcomed the involvement of the international community in referendum preparations, saying he was "much more at ease," now, and that only "awful results" happened when people in the former Yugoslavia were allowed "to decide things on their own - with the worst results for Bosniacs." He welcomed poloff's description of the USG vision for the future of the boundary/border between Serbia and Montenegro, no matter the outcome of the referendum: an EU-style border, with no police posts, guard shacks or customs houses.

Comment

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¶17. (SBU) While individual votes will vary, it appears the pro-Independence bloc has clearly won the minority establishment to its side, despite a rocky past. With no ethnic group having a majority in Montenegro, the DPS and Djukanovic's success bodes well for their chances in the referendum. End comment.

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